- green (to overcome negative points);
- white; and then
- blue

References
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de Bono, E. (1986), *Six Thinking Hats*, Little, Brown, New York.
de Bono, E. (1995),Serious Creativity, Journal for Quality and Participation, 18, 5, 12-18, USA.

Leadership styles and problem solving - de Bono's 'Six Hats'

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Leadership - a definition
The ability to get work done with and through others, while at the same time winning their confidence, respect, loyalty and willing cooperation

The first part of the definition could be a definition of management
The complete definition highlights the difference between simply managing and being a leader

Leadership
Leaders influence many aspects of work, they:

are the chief communicator of the group;
affect motivation by their behaviour; and
are responsible for the group's objectives being understood and achieved
As leadership is a critical influence of group performance,
it is worth understanding more about leadership and what makes an effective leader

Effective leadership
Contrary to popular belief, no one is born a leader
But some people do have certain abilities that predispose them to developing into a leader
Like public speaking, and many other skills, leadership can be learned and developed

While there is no agreed list of qualities that make a good leader
And different leadership styles suit different situations
It is widely agreed that leaders tend to have the following characteristics:

Intelligence ≠ academic achievement
Social maturity = emotional maturity and a wide range of interests
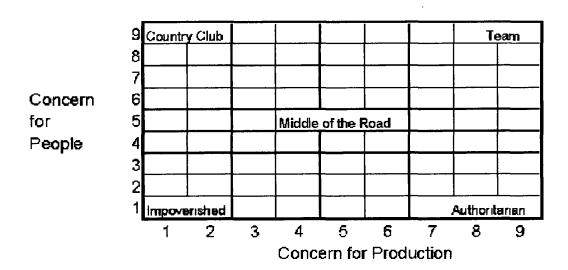Self-motivation and an achievement orientation
Self confidence and good communications skills

Theories of leadership
There has been a lot of research into styles of leadership
And the general conclusion is that a leader's concern for production needs to be balanced with a concern for subordinates

Robert Blake and Jane Mouton have devised the 'Management Grid'
This is a framework for identifying a range of leadership styles
Based on combinations of concern for people and concern for production

The Blake and Mouton 'Management Grid'

Blake and Mouton argue that the 9.9 management style is the most effective type of leadership behaviour
This approach will generally result in improved performance, low absenteeism and turnover and high employee satisfaction

Situational leadership
We find that much of the recent research highlights the influence of situational factors on which leadership style a manager should use

Hersey and Blanchard's leadership theory says that a leader must chose a style that is appropriate for the situation
ie. a manager leading an inexperienced group will need to spell out what is required and closely supervise the work
a manager of an experienced team is probably better off getting out of their way and just monitoring their progress

Problem solving & creativity
You will recall that we said leadership is just one of many skills that can be learned and developed
Well, so is problem solving and creativity
In fact, de Bono says, creativity is not natural, and we have to learn it

All through our life we subconsciously look for patterns which help us predict the future
ie, things fall down, the sun rises in the east, you can't build a house out of plasticine, etc
Over time we come to depend on these patterns,
and they tend to control and limit both our actions and our thinking

de Bono recounts from his University days how he was newly arrived and couldn't get back before the gates were closed at night
A companion told him how to climb over the two fences to get in after hours
He climbed one high fence and jumped to the ground
He got up and climbed the next fence only to find himself outside again - HOW?

He had climbed over near a corner and climbed out again over the nearest fence, which was the other outer wall
When he went around to the front gate, he discovered it had been open all the time

He had just imagined that it was closed, because that's how it was done normally

de Bono talks about 'vertical thinking' and 'lateral thinking'

Vertical thinking
Vertical thinking is where we base our thought processes on our prior knowledge, our experience and logic
Our thought processes are based on assumptions and follow a logical sequence
This is the natural form of thinking
It constrains our creativity and ability to solve problems

I was told the gate will be closed, so there is no point in checking it

Lateral thinking
A set of systematic techniques used for changing concepts and perceptions and generating new ones
More generally - exploring multiple possibilities and approaches instead of pursuing a single approach

The 'six hats' is one of de Bono's techniques

I could check the gate before I jump the fence
Is this fence in front of me really the second fence I have to get over?

If we are innocent or ignorant of the 'done thing', we can produce very creative solutions
Children and non-experts can sometimes produce creative solutions to problems
If we are neither innocent or ignorant, we can employ lateral thinking techniques to help us be creative

There is a story of a group of women being shown around a war time factory
Someone mentioned a problem in the sharpening of carbon electrodes used in search lights
One of the women suggested using a pencil sharpener
It worked!

de Bono has provided the world with a number of techniques that can be used to stimulate lateral thinking
The 'six hats' is not a lateral thinking technique per se, rather a structured process for introducing lateral thinking into problem solving, particularly in groups

de Bono's 'Six Hats'
de Bono describes the six hats as a 'game'
but you should be carefully not to underestimate the power in its simplicity
Many major international organisations use this technique for problem solving

Each 'hat' represents a perspective or way of thinking
They are metaphorical hats that a thinker can put on or take off to indicate the type of thinking they are using
In a group we can ask members to 'put on' different hats in a sequence to aide the problem solving process

This can help overcome the problem of each group member adopting random positions at random times
It also permits us to control people who insist of sticking to one perspective (ie. negative) - we can ask them to assume a different hat

Let's describe the various hats we can wear

The white hat
White is neutral
While wearing the white hat we ignore arguments and proposals,
we examine the facts, figures and information that we have, and
identify what information we don't have, and how we might get it

What information do we have here?
What information is missing?
What information would we like to have?
How are we going to get the information?

The red hat
Red is for feelings, hunches and intuition
It permits people to put forward their feelings without the need for apology, explanation or attempt to justify them
Intuition may be a composite judgement based on years of experience, and
it can be valuable even if the reasons behind it cannot be spelled out consciously

Putting on my red hat, this is what I think about the project ...
My gut feeling is that it will not work
I don't like the way this is being done
My intuition tells me that prices will fall soon

The black hat
The black hat is the logical negative
It is the hat of caution & critical judgement
It is the most used hat, and perhaps the most valuable hat, mistakes may be disastrous
At the same time, it is very easy to overuse the black hat, it is easy to kill creative ideas with early negativity

The regulations do not permit us to do that
We do not have the production capacity to meet that order
When we tried a higher price the sales fell off
He has no experience in export management

The yellow hat
The yellow hat is for optimism and the logical positive view of things
It looks for feasibility and how something can be done
It looks for benefits, but they must be logically based

That might work if we moved the production plant nearer to the customers
The benefit would come from repeat purchases
The high cost of energy would make everyone more energy efficient

The green hat
The green hat is for creative thinking, new ideas and additional alternatives
Putting on the green hat makes time and space for creative effort
This is were we engage in lateral thinking and other creative techniques

We need some new ideas here
Are there any additional alternatives?
Could we do this in a different way?
Could there be another explanation?

The blue hat
The blue hat is the thinking overview or process control hat
It is usually used by the chairperson of the meeting:
it sets the agenda for thinking;
it suggests the next step for thinking;
it asks for summaries, conclusions and decisions

We have spent far too much time looking for someone to blame
Could we have a summary of your views?
I think we should take a look at the priorities
I suggest we try some green hat thinking to get some new ideas

de Bono's 'Six Hats'
It is common for meetings to get bogged down in arguments where people take positions and defend them to the death
The 6 hats is a cooperative tool rather than a adversarial tool
In a normal meeting, it is easy for someone not to look for positives if they do not support an idea - the 6 hats technique challenges participants to see all sides

Some people see the downside in everything
The 6 hats technique offers them ample opportunity for black hat thinking,
but challenges them to think in other ways as well
It is important the hats are not categories or labels for people
rather than limiting people, the aim of the 6 hats is to get the thinker to use all 6 hats

Some times it is possible to put together a sequence of hats that will assist in thinking productively about some matter

The actual order will vary with the situation,
but for a new matter, the sequence might be:

The six hats - for a new problem

- White - to get information;
- Green - for ideas and proposals;
- Yellow followed by Black on each alternative - to evaluate alternatives;
- Red - to assess feelings at this point;
- Blue - to decide what thinking to do next

For a well known idea
For a well known proposal, the sequence of hats might run.

- red;
- yellow;
- black;